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The First Nut

Ballet Frontier of Texas started out the season with one of their best *Nutcrackers*; with more shows coming in Granbury and Waco.

by [Emily Sese](#)

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Fort Worth — While the cusp of winter brings cozy sweaters and holiday fun, every ballerina also knows that the temperature drop means one thing: Nutcracker season. In one of the first of the season, **Ballet Frontier of Texas** invited audiences to celebrate the holidays with a delightfully wholesome rendition of their annual performance of *The Nutcracker*, performed at Will Rogers Auditorium. There will be subsequent performances in Granbury and Waco.

Utilizing dancers of all ages from their companies and classes, the elaborate production bustled with full, busy staging, whimsical interactions, and impressive technique from the older groups. With both familiar faces and fresh additions to the company, the entire experience was quite picturesque and entertaining.

As the curtain rose for Act I, bold painted sets and sparkling props set a festive scene for Clara and Fritz's party guests. During the Saturday evening show, Beatrice Reyes rendered a delightful Clara — radiating joy and youthful curiosity in her colorful expressions and charismatic turns. Filled with cheery pantomime, exaggerated gestures, and carefully organized formations, the party scene brilliantly embodied holiday excitement.

Upon the entrance of the patchwork-clad mice, a lighthearted battle between the comical creatures and the robotic toy soldiers unleashed a flurry of movement on



Photo: Todd Wakefield

Ballet Frontier of Texas presents *The Nutcracker* 2019



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the stage. Opting for a more family-friendly aesthetic throughout the production as a whole, the battle scene featured silly falls, exaggerated looks of horror, and of course a gallant Nutcracker savior.

But the highlight of the first act, and arguably the entire show, was Nerea Barrondo's (Saturday evening casting) Snow Queen performance. In the classic *pas de deux*, Barrondo swirled in graceful circles around the stage as her partner, Kaito Yamamoto (Saturday evening casting) guided her with supportive lifts. Despite this being her first season with Ballet Frontier of Texas, it's clear that Barrondo has a long career ahead of her. Commanding attention with a confident yet delicate stage presence, her immaculate technique and dizzying turning sequences were just a bonus.

The charming atmosphere of the opening numbers continued into Act II's Kingdom of Sweets with the introduction of a slew of fanciful characters. During the Saturday night production, Hannah Wakefield flourished in her role as the Sugar Plum Fairy with the remarkable Marlen Alimanov as the tenacious Cavalier. Despite this dynamic pairing, Alimanov often outshined his delicate partner with resilient leaps and precise turns.

Amongst the *divertissements* that followed, the Arabian section proved to be the most engaging and technically diverse. Victoria Trimble and Andrew Lo (Saturday evening casting) gave a tremendous performance of slithering hips, twisting legs, and acrobatic partnering.

With springy steps and airy hops, the Chinese dancers came in close second in terms of wow-factor. Luke Jones (Saturday evening casting) impressed viewers through his colossal height and bouncy toe-touches. My only qualm of the performance fell to the outdated use of chopstick fingers scattered throughout the choreography.

Other groups like the Spanish, Shepherdess, Russian, and Bon Bons showcased the multi-leveled composition of the cast and Artistic Director Chung-Lin Tseng's ability to merge these dancers together harmoniously.

A sharp, fast-paced Waltz of the Flowers made for a dynamic conclusion in the Kingdom of Sweets, complete with a crisp, precise Dewdrop solo from Elizabeth Dennen (Saturday evening casting).

In a traditional finish, the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier returned for a delightful *pas de deux* — once again highlighting Alimanov's grounded support and prolific technique. His solo variation captured expansive jumps and meticulous spins, setting him apart in maturity and experience from other leading members of the company.

Over the years, Ballet Frontier of Texas has produced an enchanting rendition of the beloved *Nutcracker* — this year being no exception. With so much new-found talent and Tseng's skill for cultivating a wholesome, magical atmosphere, it's no wonder that this particular production will continue to the Granbury Opera House (Dec. 8-11) and Waco Hall (Dec. 15). **TJ**



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